UCLA Faculty Association

News and opinion from Dan Mitchell since 2009

Tuesday, February 17, 2026

Straws in the Wind - Part 256

From the Lansing State Journal: *Michigan State University Trustee Rema Vassar is at odds with key university leaders after she called for the college to reverse changes to diversity, equity and inclusion made since President Donald Trump took office. Vassar authored an opinion column on Feb. 2 that was published by Bridge Michigan, and called for MSU to reinstate numerous DEI-focused initiatives and support programs across campus. "MSU must act immediately to reverse every decision made under the false pretense of legal compliance," Vassar, a Detroit Democrat, wrote in the column. "MSU now stands exposed: Every decision to dismantle equity infrastructure was a choice, not a legal requirement. And that choice was made not just without legal justification, but in defiance of constitutional protections."*

Some university officials took issue with the editorial, including Michigan State President Kevin Guskiewicz and board chair Brianna Scott, D-Muskegon. Guskiewicz said the column was inaccurate and misleading, and Scott said it had several mischaracterizations. Both said said they had not seen the column prior to its publication. "Like many on our leadership team, we were disappointed by the op-ed, believe that it was misleading and mischaracterized many of the efforts that we've made as an institution to support our communities, during a challenging time with changes coming out of the federal government," Guskiewicz said. He said after the board's Feb. 6 meeting that the university is working to correct "several inaccuracies" in the op-ed and that officials will be taking the time throughout the week to "meet with members of those communities to reinforce our commitment to them." ...

Full story at https://www.lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/local/campus/2026/02/10/michigan-state-university-dei-black-students-rema-vassar-guskiewicz/88591853007/.

Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:20 AM No comments:

Labels: diversity, Michigan State University, politics

The Drumbeat Continues...

The Council of UC Faculty Associations

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- Fight for the Future of Higher Education: Academic Freedom from the Classroom to the Clinic
- Our Concerns Over Revisions to APMs 15 and 16
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- Letter from AAUP to UC Objecting to Trellix

Remaking the University

- Liner Note 48. The Faculty's Budget Fight at UCLA - 2/23/2026
- Liner Note 47. Did The Atlantic's Anti-Woke Bias Spoil its Analysis of Humanities Funding Death? - 2/16/2026
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- UC-AFT

Topics

Can the Epstein drumbeat sound like a witch hunt? It sure does to yours truly when anyone - no matter how peripheral - gets tainted whose name appears in an email. Example:

From the Daily Pennsylvanian: *Penn Psychology professor and Director of the Undergraduate Honors Program Coren Apicella approached Jeffrey Epstein's foundation for research funding in 2012, four years after his first conviction, according to a newly released email exchange. The email — which looked to garner funding for Apicella's Human Behavioral Origins laboratory — was originally sent to Epstein's foundation and forwarded to his personal email alongside a note describing the offer as "interesting." Apicella personally thanked Epstein for "indirectly" supporting some of her previous research endeavors in the Nov. 15, 2012 message.*

***"I never knew Jeffrey Epstein," Apicella wrote in a statement to The Daily Pennsylvanian. "I sent a single email to the Epstein Foundation in 2012 to ask whether it was accepting grant proposals. I received no follow-up correspondence or funding** and I was certainly not aware of any of his horrific crimes when I sent the email."*

The email exchange is one of thousands of files released by the Department of Justice earlier this month. Apicella has not been accused of any wrongdoing in connection with Epstein or his crimes...

Full story at https://www.thedp.com/article/2026/02/penn-professor-coren-apicella-solicited-donations-epstein.

Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:10 AM No comments:

Labels: fund raising, U of Pennsylvania

Will Harvard Continue to Lead the Charge? - Part 123

From the Harvard Crimson: *The Trump administration's Friday lawsuit seeking Harvard's admissions records may run up against the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, a federal law that restricts the disclosure of student records that could identify individual applicants, according to legal experts. Scholars said the Department of Justice's demand for applicant-level admissions data — including grades, standardized test scores, race, and internal*

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evaluations — risks violating FERPA because those data points, when combined, could make individual students identifiable, even if names are removed.

...Vinay Harpalani, a professor of law at the University of New Mexico, said he would "be surprised" if the administration were to succeed, citing the confidentiality issues inherent in providing applicant-level data. "That risks particular privacy concerns there," Harpalani said. "If the individual data from a single applicant can all be linked — all the data, the grade, the test score, their race, ethnicity, other features about them — then that applicant might be able to be identified as an individual. And that could be problematic, that could run in violation of the FERPA," he added...

The complaint asks a federal court to compel Harvard to turn over "documents relating to applicant-level admissions decisions" that the Department of Justice said it requested as part of the review. Jonathan D. Glater, a professor of law at University of California, Berkeley, said the DOJ's demand may run afoul of FERPA because the department is not an entity authorized to access student admissions records. "Student personally identifiable information is protected by FERPA," Glater wrote in a statement. "DOJ is not a listed entity and this is not part of a criminal investigation, so I'm not sure how this works." ...

Full story at https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2026/2/16/DOJ-lawsuit-expert-analysis/.

Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:05 AM No comments:

Labels: admissions, Harvard, politics

Monday, February 16, 2026

Get It While You can

The state controller's cash report is out for the first seven months of fiscal 2025-26 and - guess what? - revenues are running ahead of the forecast made at the time the current state budget was passed to the tune of $15 billion. Indeed, revenues are running ahead of the updated forecast made last month when the governor made his budget proposal for next year to the tune of $6.9 billion.

Now, we all know that much of this overage seems to be fueled by AI spending, which filters into tax revenues by way of the stock market and capital gains. And we all know that it could be a bubble and that - if it is - revenues will slump when it bursts, i.e., we could have a repeat of the dot-com boom/dot-com bust. If that happens, revenues will drop and a crisis will occur.

We know, in addition, that the Legislative Analyst's Office keeps warning of a "structural" budget problem in the years to come. And blog readers will know that even with the governor's optimistic forecast for the economy, we are currently running a deficit (total reserves of the general fund are being drawn down).* We know from the dot-com boom/bust episode that if the state is not socking away a lot of cash at the peak of the cycle, a downturn will be especially painful.

With all of that knowledge, however, it is unlikely that the legislature is going to accept austerity now when it sees extra revenue coming in. And the governor, who is running for president and is termed out, seems unlikely to want to play Dr. No. If he can just make it to next January without a fiscal mess developing, he can say it didn't happen on his watch, and leave whatever problems that follow to his successor.

So, the best advice yours truly can give to UC lobbyists is "Get It While You Can" - because every other interest group will be seeing what I see.

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Contributors

- California Policy Issues
- Toby Higbie
- UCLA Faculty Association

Or direct to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtj9w2gYzV4.

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*https://uclafacultyassociation.blogspot.com/2026/01/the-no-hassles-while-im-in-office-state.html.

Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:30 AM No comments:

Labels: controller, governor, LAO, politics, State Budget, UC budget crisis

Straws in the Wind - Part 255

From the Daily Pennsylvanian: *Last October, the notorious cybercrime group ShinyHunters infiltrated Penn's internal data system and demanded a $1 million ransom from the University to prevent the release of the files on the dark web. After the ransom went unpaid, the hackers surfaced online to take credit for the attack and set the record straight. Since 2019, ShinyHunters has gained notoriety in the hacking community for orchestrating large-scale attacks on major corporations such as Google, AT&T Wireless, Ticketmaster, and SoundCloud. This fall, the group set its sights on Penn. "We decided to hit Penn same-day," a spokesperson for the group said via Signal, an encrypted messaging app. "Some planning and preparation goes into attacking a new organisation, but we can move pretty quickly."*

Requests for comment were left with a University spokesperson... ShinyHunters released the cache of confidential University files — including dated records and donor contact information — on its website on Feb. 4...

Full story at https://www.thedp.com/article/2026/02/penn-hack-donor-data-ransom-one-million-shinyhunters-gse-emai.

Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:20 AM No comments:

Labels: U of Pennsylvania

Will Harvard Continue to Lead the Charge? - Part 122

From the Harvard Crimson: *More than half of Harvard's varsity teams saw their average grade point averages drop in fall 2025, marking a sharp semester-to-semester downturn across sports programs amid the College's push to rein in grade inflation. Among the 26 men's and women's teams reviewed by The Crimson — representing over half of Harvard's 42 varsity programs — nearly all recorded GPA declines from spring 2025.*

The downturn comes as Harvard tightens grading standards. In an October report, Dean of Undergraduate Education Amanda Claybaugh described grade inflation as a threat to the College's academic mission. Faculty reduced the share of As awarded from 60.2 percent in the spring to 53.4 percent in the fall — a shift that came alongside declines in team GPAs across the athletics department.

...The ongoing debate at the College and FAS over how to curb grade inflation could further shape team GPAs in the semesters ahead. A faculty committee proposal released last week would limit A-range grades to 20 percent in each course, with room for four additional As per class, starting next academic year. The proposal will be reviewed by the Faculty Council and is expected to come before the full faculty later this semester. Students have signalled widespread resistance to the proposal. In a Harvard Undergraduate Association survey this week that drew responses from almost 800 students, nearly 85 percent said they opposed the proposed cap on A grades.

Full story at https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2026/2/12/team-gpa-trends/.

Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:10 AM No comments:

Labels: Harvard

(Tuition) Strike News

From the Daily Cal: *Graduate student organizers in the UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare began a tuition strike Jan. 19 in response to "grave concerns" about recent layoffs of two union-protected lecturers in the program. The lecturers... were named in a letter that students sent to leadership at Berkeley Social Welfare. Campus spokesperson Janet Gilmore said campus could not comment on confidential personnel matters.*

In the letter, students said their tuition strike is also in protest of further grievances regarding department budget cuts and tuition increases. Students expressed that they felt there were "troubling patterns that have severely degraded the quality and integrity of our program"and announced that a collective tuition strike would "begin immediately." The letter also details a list of demands, including the reversal of [the two] layoffs, restoration of practicum support, financial transparency and tuition freezes, reduction of required practicum hours and student representation in administrative decision-making...

Gilmore said campus would not speculate about the impacts of a tuition strike, but that campus policies around nonpayment would apply. According to the campus Student Billing website, if a student has unpaid fees of $100 or more over 60 days past due, Billing and Payment Services

is authorized "to place a hold on a student's registration and diploma until the financial obligation is satisfied." ...

Full story at https://www.dailycal.org/news/campus/uc-berkeley-school-of-social-welfare-students-begin-tuition-strike-over-staff-layoffs/article_64dd6826-bc01-44d0-a9a0-cfdde90928c2.html.

Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:05 AM No comments:

Labels: strikes, tuition, UC-Berkeley

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